

Republican Leader Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Oversight & Investigations Hearing
“Lessons from the Frontline: COVID-19’s Impact on American Health
Care”
March 2, 2022
As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Chair DeGette and Republican Leader Griffith.

We owe it to today’s witnesses and all our frontline heroes to listen to them, to understand their perspectives, and to provide solutions.

THEY ARE OWED ANSWERS

The families who lost loved ones – about 947,000 in the U.S. -- and those who suffered and sacrificed during this pandemic--- are owed answers to many questions.

First question: how did this pandemic start?

Republicans on this committee have been leading a comprehensive investigation into the origins of COVID-19 and we continue to urge our Democrat colleagues to join us in our pursuit for the truth.

Understanding how this pandemic started is one of the most important public health questions of our time – and it is necessary to answer to hopefully prevent future pandemics.

BETTER PREPARATION

Second: why weren’t we better prepared?

The federal government could have provided more resources to the healthcare responders.

For years, the Republicans on this committee have raised concerns about the wisdom of not funding frontline healthcare preparedness instead of spending more than \$80 million a year on the BioWatch program that started in 2004.

In a report to the bipartisan leadership of this committee, the GAO found this program doesn't have the science to show that it even works.

We've also raised concerns about relying on China and other foreign countries for critical medical supplies. – which we know we must address.

THE CDC MIXING OF POLITICS WITH SCIENCE

Third question: why is the CDC mixing politics with science?

Lockdowns, distancing, and masking were almost exclusively emphasized by the CDC, while concerns about the effects on mental health and social and economic costs have been ignored.

Fortunately, the Trump administration led public-private efforts to expedite development of effective vaccines and therapeutics.

The vaccines vastly reduce the risk of death and hospitalization AND we now have data on what many of us have known from the beginning – natural immunity provides robust protection.

But even with the effective vaccines and better understanding of who is most at risk, the Biden administration has continued an unbalanced response... uninformed by these advances.

There is FAR too much fear and FAR too much confusion.

CDC – LEADING FROM BEHIND ON SCHOOLS AND MASKING

The CDC led from behind on the issue of school closures.

Several countries in Europe never closed their schools.

Some localities in the U.S., and even CDC Director Walensky herself before she came to the CDC, saw no difference in safety between three feet and the CDC-recommended six feet distancing that was keeping schools closed – yet when her agency put out school guidance, she required six feet of distance.

Why? Because she gave the teachers union a pen.

As a direct result of CDC's guidance, children have paid a significant price in mental health harms, lagging education, and lost time for social development.

Even when schools were mostly reopened, CDC continued to force masking requirements, even for young children in a departure from the WHO and UNICEF recommendations.

CDC CHERRY PICKING AND WITHHOLDING DATA

And CDC continues to rely on discredited studies to force their masking agenda on kids.

The CDC suppressed a large study it funded that showed little benefit to masking in schools.

It cherry picked data by highlighting a discredited study and suppressing another one.

But there is more to the politics at the CDC.

The CDC has collected data on vaccine and booster effectiveness, breakthrough infections, and wastewater analysis but released very little of it. The CDC deprived hospitals and frontline workers of data that would have better informed mitigation and treatment efforts.

All these moves of the CDC have undermined trust in public trust when it was needed most.

OTHER ACTIONS ALSO MADE IT HARDER

Fourth question: why did the Biden administration take actions that made it harder on frontline health care workers?

Many hospitals struggled with staffing shortages, but vaccine mandates may have further worsened the staffing situation at some hospitals.

During the height of the Omicron surge, the Biden administration took nearly \$7 billion from the Provider Relief Fund meant to help hospitals and clinics affected by the pandemic and used it to buy Covid-19 vaccines and therapeutics.

Congress had set aside that money to help providers pay for pandemic-related expenses including staffing, personal protective equipment, care for uninsured patients, and vaccine distribution.

This relief was badly needed by rural hospitals that were competing to hire temporary contract staff.

These are just a few of the questions that this committee needs to pursue.

We must get answers to ensure the ensure front line heroes like all of you have trust and confidence in your government and public health.